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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6248  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0591  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 8941

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 001699

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI MISSION TO OPEN EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD, NOT JUST  
EXPLORATORY

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Murphy  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Following Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal's August 7 announcement regarding the SAG's intention to send a delegation to Baghdad this week to look into reopening its Embassy in the Iraqi capital, Norwegian Charge d'Affaires Paal Bjornestad told Poloff that the Saudi Head of the European Affairs Department at the MFA reported on August 11 that Prince Mohammed bin Faisal al-Turki from the MFA will head the delegation to Baghdad later this week. He said that they will stay in the old Saudi embassy building, which was abandoned in December 1990, to check its infrastructure and ability to reopen. He also said that, contrary to media reports, this delegation is not going merely on an "assessment mission." Instead, he reported that they are charged with staying in Baghdad until the Saudi embassy is officially reopened.

¶2. (C) Prince Mohammed will meet with Acting Deputy Chief of Mission and Acting Political Counselor August 13 (septel). Charge d'Affaires passed along Embassy Baghdad's Political Counselor and Point of Contact for the Saudi Mission Matt Tueller's information to Ambassador Mohammed Tayib, the senior Saudi MFA official presently in-country and Director of the MFA representation in Jeddah on August 11.

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BACKGROUND  
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¶3. (U) According to press reports, Prince Saud said "the opening of the Saudi Embassy in Baghdad will be a positive element in boosting relations between the two countries and exploring what the Kingdom can do to help Iraq in all fields." He further noted that the SAG's decision to reopen its Embassy follows talks with a visiting Iraqi security delegation in July. (Note: Saudi Arabia closed its embassy in Baghdad December 1990 on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War and a break in diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein's regime. Although Iraq opened its embassy in Saudi Arabia in 2004, a Saudi embassy was not reopened in Baghdad due to security concerns. End Note.)

¶4. (U) Conservative internet websites and chatrooms criticized this announcement and warned the SAG that Shi'a groups might kidnap or even kill Saudi diplomats, citing the July 2005 assassination of the Egyptian ambassador to Iraq. A featured editorial in Saudi mainstream Arabic-language Ar Riyadh newspaper also criticized the MFA announcement. In addition to citing the lack of security for would-be Saudi diplomats, the editorial accused the SAG of inappropriately reacting to the USG's critical stance on the SAG's lack of support for Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, postulating that the SAG should show moral support for the Iraqi government, but not in the traditional political way at this juncture.

Unofficial reactions also echoed these criticisms.  
GFOELLER